UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General condemns "brutal acts of terrorism" in Jerusalem and Ashkelon; Security Council Members call on parties to continue supporting Middle East peace process.

* Secretary-General tells Special Committee on Inalienable Rights of Palestinian People that acts of violence in past year clearly intended to derail peace process.

* Member States owe United Nations $3.2 billion as of 15 February; $1.3 billion owed to regular budget, $1.9 billion to peace-keeping and $11.6 million to International Tribunals.

* Second round of inter-Tajik talks end without extending cease-fire.

* Commission on Population and Development meets at UN Headquarters; to focus on reproductive rights.

* Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy concludes two week session; proposes UN conference on energy for twenty-first century.

* Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination to examine measures by countries to combat racism.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has condemned, in the strongest possible terms, the attacks on buses in Jerusalem and Ashkelon, Israel yesterday, according to a United Nations spokesman. The Secretary-General said he was shocked and appalled at the "brutal acts of terrorism" and "this new attack on the peace process for which we have all worked so long and so hard". He called on men and women of good will not to allow the terrorists to derail the precious gains achieved by the Palestinian and Israeli people already at great cost.

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Meanwhile, Security Council President Madeleine Albright (United States) told correspondents that Council Members condemned all acts of terrorism, including the attacks on buses in Jerusalem and Ashkelon and extended their deepest sympathies to the Government and people of Israel and especially to the families of the victims. She said Council Members reaffirmed their strong support for the Middle East peace process and called on the parties to spare no effort in supporting, consolidating and advancing that process.

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Despite some setbacks, the vision inherent in the Declaration of Principles signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993 had been sustained, the Secretary-General said today. He told the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that both parties had demonstrated their commitment to the principles and provisions of the Agreement and their determination to implement it. Both had also accepted negotiation as the means to resolve immediate and long-term political differences.

However, the security situation was a cause for concern and acts of violence over the past year had clearly been intended to derail the peace process, the Secretary-General continued. Referring to the terrorist bombing in Jerusalem and Ashkelon yesterday, he asked how many more innocent people must die before there was peace and in the region. Stressing that extremism from any quarter must be curbed, he said the most effective way to do that was to ensure negotiations continued and the benefits from achievements already reached were apparent and accessible.

It was essential to address economic instability and improve poor living conditions especially in the Gaza Strip, he continued. The United Nations was contributing to the economic and social development on which an effective transition to Palestinian self-rule must be based. That, in turn, would assure a foundation for lasting peace. UN programmes and agencies were facilitating the development of public works projects to create immediate employment opportunities and bring visible change to the Gaza Strip. A coordination mechanism had been established to ensure effective disbursement of donor funds and Palestinian police were receiving training and assistance. There had been improvements, particularly in institution-building and infrastructure, he added.

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As of 15 February, Member States owed the United Nations a total of $3.2 billion, according to the latest update on the Organization's financial situation. Of that amount, $1.3 billion was for assessments to the regular budget and $1.9 billion for peace-keeping operations. An additional $11.6 million was owed for the International Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Included in the figures for peace-keeping and the Tribunals are assessments within the 30-day due period.

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The Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, Sergey V. Lavrov, met with the Secretary-General today and reiterated his Government's support for the inter-Tajik negotiating process. According to a United Nations spokesman, the second round of inter-Tajik talks ended without extending the cease-fire agreement.

Meanwhile, the co-chairman of the joint commission for the implementation of the Tajikistan cease-fire agreement, Zafar Rakhmonov, was kidnapped in Dushanbe on Friday, according to the Tajikistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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The Commission on Population and Development, which began a five-day session at United Nations Headquarters today, will focus on reproductive rights and health, including family planning, maternal and child health, abortion and information on sexuality. Many issues, such as the reproductive health rights of adolescents and the role of men in fertility regulation, have only recently attracted international attention. The Commission will study reports on initiatives by Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations on those issues, as well as challenges to promoting reproductive rights and enhancing reproductive health.

Adolescent reproductive behaviour has become a world-wide concern, according to reports before the Commission. Mainly because of the sensitivity of the subject, most countries do not have coherent policies to protect adolescent reproductive health, even though young people have a special need for information on sexual and reproductive health. Information on sexuality, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, combined with information about local services and counselling is an effective way of assisting young people.

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The Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development has proposed that a United Nations conference on energy for the twenty-first century be held in the year 2001. The Committee, which concluded its two-week session on Friday, approved a draft resolution on the conference, which would try and mobilize world opinion on energy for sustainable development. According to the terms of the draft, the Economic and Social Council would ask the Secretary-General to examine the feasibility of such a conference and report to the General Assembly during its fifty-second session in 1997.

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The Committee also approved a draft decision by which the Economic and Social Council would urge international financial organizations to dedicate a larger portion of their funds to research and development for energy efficiency and renewable energy. The funding should facilitate the commercialization of renewable energy and achieve a more sustainable mix in national energy consumption.

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Measures to combat racial discrimination by 9 countries will be examined by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which will meet from 26 February to 15 March in Geneva. The countries are Zimbabwe, Russian Federation, Colombia, Denmark, United Kingdom, Finland, Hungary, Spain and Venezuela. The 18-member Committee is the first body created by the United Nations to review actions by States in fulfilling their obligations under a specific human rights agreement, in this case, the 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It examines reports submitted periodically by States parties to the Convention.

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